United Nations A/64/82/Add.1–E/2009/82/Add.1

General Assembly
Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
22 June 2009

Original: English

General Assembly
Sixty-fourth session
Item 133 of the preliminary list*
Joint Inspection Unit

Economic and Social Council
Substantive session of 2009
Item 7 of the provisional agenda**
Coordination, programme and other questions

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on Junior Professional Officer/Associate Expert/Associate Professional Officer programmes in United Nations system organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith, for the consideration of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on Junior Professional Officer/Associate Expert/Associate Professional Officer programmes in United Nations system organizations (JIU/REP/2008/2).

* A/64/50.
** E/2009/100.

09-37589 (E) 010709

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Summary

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Junior Professional Officer/Associate Expert/Associate Professional Officer programmes in United Nations system organizations" assesses the current status of those programmes and includes recommendations directed at the Economic and Social Council intended to enhance the accountability, controls and compliance of the programmes, as well as recommendations directed at executive heads to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness.

The current report presents the views of United Nations system organizations on the recommendations provided in the Joint Inspection Unit report, which have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). CEB members welcome the comprehensive report and note that it provides an excellent review of the background, structures and experiences of the Junior Professional Officer/Associate Expert/Associate Professional Officer programmes and represents an excellent analysis of those programmes within United Nations organizations. Agencies generally accept the recommendations contained in the report, although they note that financial constraints, coupled with the limited number of individuals participating in those programmes compared with the United Nations system workforce as a whole, may limit implementation of those recommendations that are directed at agencies. However, they support recommendations calling for the review and, where appropriate, revision and updating of the resolution that serves as the policy base for the Junior Professional Officer programme.

I. Introduction

1. The Joint Inspection Unit report entitled "Junior Professional Officer/Associate Expert/Associate Professional Officer programmes in United Nations system organizations" assesses the current state of those programmes and recommends "measures to improve their political, organizational and operational conditions". Noting that all participants — donors, organizations, Junior Professional Officers, Associate Experts and Associate Professional Officers — expressed satisfaction with those programmes, the report nevertheless highlights several areas where improvement can be made.

II. General comments

2. CEB members welcomed the report, noting that the excellent review of the background, structures and experiences of the Junior Professional Officer/Associate Expert/Associate Professional Officer (JPO/AE/APO) programmes of United Nations organizations included a solid analysis of those programmes within United Nations organizations and captured in a clear and concise manner their strengths, challenges and opportunities. Many agencies expressed appreciation that their existing APO/JPO programmes were well reflected within the report.

3. Recognizing that the report was the first of its kind to focus on those important human resource programmes, agencies expressed general agreement with the thrust of the report and its recommendations and confirmed that those programmes remained very useful for the United Nations system, donor countries and the career development of young professionals. However, agencies nonetheless observed that some of the recommendations had financial implications and, as organizations operated within strict financial constraints, those financial implications would need to be carefully identified and addressed within the financial frameworks of the respective organizations.

III. Specific comments on recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Economic and Social Council should revisit its resolution 849 (XXXII) of 4 August 1961, which serves as a policy basis for the JPO/AE/APO programmes, and redefine the objectives, the guiding principles of assignment and the principles of financing of the programmes, with the aim of updating them to reflect current realities.

4. Organizations agree with recommendation 1 and are in favour of the Economic and Social Council reviewing and, where appropriate, revising and updating the resolution that serves as the policy base for the JPO programme.

Recommendation 2

The Economic and Social Council should encourage the development of modalities to provide more visibility for the JPO/AE/APO programmes and thus strengthen the support of the Member States for these programmes.

5. Organizations support this recommendation and agree that the JPO programme would benefit from strengthened support from Member States, which could be achieved through more visibility.

Recommendation 3

The Economic and Social Council should encourage the elaboration of a set of proposals to increase the funding possibilities for candidates from developing countries to participate in the JPO/AE/APO programmes.

6. Organizations welcome the recommendation to extend the JPO programme to more candidates from developing countries and support further exploring the funding suggestions contained within the report (paras. 61-62). Agencies indicate that extending the programme in this way would help make it more representative and also support capacity-building for development management and cooperation. Furthermore, agencies note that this recommendation is in line with the recommendations made at biennial meetings of national recruitment services and United Nations organizations. However, they observe that, while there is openness among most donors to the need for supporting the participation of developing country candidates in the JPO programme, only a limited number of donors have confirmed their interest in supporting JPO candidates from developing countries.

Recommendation 4

Executive heads should ensure that, in the framework of the human resources strategy, a clear policy and priorities are in place on the use of JPOs.

7. Agencies generally support recommendation 4 and recognize the importance of developing clear JPO policies and procedures; however, some organizations note that they do not include them in their human resources strategies, owing to the uncertainty of funding.

Recommendation 5

Executive heads should ensure that the units responsible for the operation of the JPO programmes have adequate mandate and resources for performing in a systematic way the long-term tasks related to these programmes.

8. While organizations generally support the concept behind recommendation 5, some have indicated that limited resources prevent full implementation. However, several agencies have begun activity-based costing exercises as a first step towards determining the direct administrative costs of the programmes.

Recommendation 6

The Human Resources Network of CEB should discuss and endorse the unified set of criteria to be applied by all organizations having significant JPO programmes to carry out the monitoring of the programmes and client satisfaction surveys.

Recommendation 7

The Human Resources Network of CEB should discuss and initiate the establishment of a system-wide tracking and career counselling system for former JPOs and, through an increased flow of information and cooperation among the recruitment services, should make better use across the system of the JPOs who showed a high level of performance during their assignment.

9. Agencies of the United Nations system, during a discussion at the CEB Human Resources Network regarding recommendations 6 and 7, commended the Joint Inspection Unit for its valuable report, including its reference to the activities of the JPO service centre of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the area of JPO monitoring for career counselling. However, the Human Resources Network noted that, owing to the fact that JPOs represent a relatively small group of individuals within the overall workforce, current resource constraints within agencies would prevent organizations from proceeding with full implementation of recommendations 6 and 7. The Network noted the services provided by UNDP, which address many of the issues highlighted by these recommendations, with some organizations exploring the possibility of joining this effort.

Recommendation 8

The executive heads should ensure that adequate monitoring and controls be in place to secure the implementation of the JPO programme, including its supervision, training and learning elements.

Recommendation 9

The executive heads should ensure that the various supervisory and administrative aspects of the programmes be supported and implemented by human resources management services taking into account the agreed recommendations of the biennial meetings of the national recruitment services and the United Nations organizations on the JPO schemes.

10. Organizations support recommendations 8 and 9 and agree that the quality of supervision during the JPO assignment is of utmost importance to the professional growth, learning and career development of JPOs and, as such, for the success of the JPO programme. Many organizations note that they have already put into place many practices intended to facilitate this process, including, for example, expectation letters to JPO supervisors. In addition, agencies point to their existing performance review systems which require that expected results be established at the beginning of the assignment (or year), thus allowing for proper monitoring, and that for some agencies exit interviews are carried out for staff on fixed-term contracts, including JPOs.